TL 4167

MASS KILLING IN LIQUIÇA

Introduction

First I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the people and government of the US for this invaluable opportunity to give a testimony about the suffering experienced by the people of Timor Leste.

My name is Francisco de Jesus da Costa. I am one of the victims and witnesses of the massacre committed by the Indonesian Military (TNI) in Liquiça who managed to escape death.

Before the bloody incident, the TNI and the paramilitary had engaged in various forms of violence such as intimidation, terror, abuse, and killing in Liquiça. They perpetrated these horrible acts to pressure and coerce people to choose the autonomy plan offered by the Indonesian government. The targets of this terror and killing are the leaders of the pro-independence movement and their followers. The terror had created an atmosphere of intense fear among the community and caused waves of refugees in different numbers to look for a safer place to live. Usually the people feel more secure in the churches.

In sub-district Liquiça where I come from, the terror reached its peak with the mass killing on April 6, 1999. Before I come to the main part of my testimony, I'll describe the incident on April 5, 1999 which caused seven people to die.

a. 5 April 1999:

The militia which is based in Maubara village, about 15 kilometers from the town of Liquiça, attacked the pro-independence people and their leaders in Liquiça. At the border of Liquiça and Maubara they encountered the pro-independence people. In this clash the TNI and the militia killed two civilians and injured seven others.

At 09:00 AM the militia backed by the TNI moved toward Liquiça town and along the way they terrorized just about everybody they encountered.

Around 02:00 PM they arrived in Liquiça town and they were accompanied by Indonesian troops who sent random shots. This action terrorized the population and made some of them flee to the residence of Father Rafael and some others ran away to the jungle to save themselves. About 1000 people gathered at the Father's residence.

An hour later the TNI and paramilitary troops terrorized the whole town of Liquiça by burning people's houses, taking away the vehicles owned by the supporters of independence and other forms of violence.

Around five in the evening, the paramilitary and the TNI killed a man, Laurindo (48) and his son, Herminho (17), and then they took their car to terrorize other people in the town. After committing this atrocious act, they killed another two civilians at the house of the

village chief of Dato. Around seven in the evening they kidnapped another man, Herminho do Santos (38), a worker at the Public Water office, and killed him later on at night.

b. 6 April 1999.

At 06:00 AM the Red and White Iron Rod (BMP) militia began to launch provocation and terror against the refugees at the residence of Father Rafael dos Santos.

Around 8:30 AM the BMP paramilitary threw stones at the refugees gathering inside the priest residence and this caused two people injured. This act continued until around 11:00 AM.

After that one of the leaders of the militia, Eurico Guterres, came to see the priest and offered a peaceful solution. The priest took the offer. Eurico then went to pass on the message about the agreement to the leader of the BMP, Manuel Sousa, and the head of Liquiça district, Leonito Martins. It turned out that both Manuel Sousa and Leonito Martins rejected the agreement made between the priest and Eurico Guterres.

Around 12:30 PM four trucks full with soldiers and two cars with police from the special force Mobil Brigade came to the area. The military were stationed at the local army headquarters (Kodim), while the police were around the location of incident.

At 1:30 PM the police attempted to drive away the militia troops from the surrounding of the priest's residence but the militia ignored it. They showed their insistence to attack us at the house.

Around 2:00 PM the militia with the support of the plain-clothes members of the Indonesian army attacked the refugees in the house of Father Rafael. The plain-clothes military shot the people from outside the fence of the priest's house, while the BMP militia rushed into the residence. They started to beat, stab and hack the people inside the priest's house. The police threw some tear gas bomb at the thousand people. The effect of this tear gas benefited the militia because they could easily butcher the refugees. Meanwhile the plain-clothes military continued to help the militia by shooting at the hundreds of people who could not get into the priest's house because it was jammed with paniked people. This horrifying attack continued until 5:30 PM. The police did not do anything toward the militia who slaughtered the people.

Along with some other people, I hid in the priest's dining room during the killing outside. Around five in the afternoon I was forced to go out to save myself. At that moment the militia beat me with a concrete block and jabbed my head. Later on I realized that there were about six wounds in my head. I was very lucky that I could escape death because a police friend whom I happened to know saved me.

When I was outside I saw dead bodies scattered on the ground, children, women, young and old people. I was walking among those corpses. I estimated that there were about 200 bodies at that time.

The police who saved me took me to the Mobil Brigade vehicle and I was taken to the house of the district head with more than 30 people who were injured. We received an emergency treatment from a nurse at the house of the sub-district head. We were coerced to promise to choose autonomy during the ballot. The sub-district head ordered us to raise the red and white flag once we returned to our house. I returned to my house but the situation was so unsafe that I decided to stay for the night at the house of the policeman. On Thursday I went to Dili to get treatment for my wounds.

The people who were still alive and wounded were taken to various places, including the sub-district and district military headquarters, the police office and the house of the district head. While the dead bodies were taken away by the military vehicles and thrown out in unknown place. Until now those corpses are not yet returned to their families for proper burial.

From the above story I want to emphasize several things:

1. The Liquiça incident was a mass killing of unarmed civilians. This massacre was committed by the militia which were armed by the Indonesian Military.
2. It can be said that the Indonesian military was both the brain and the actor of the massacre. They openly supported the militia.
3. According to an Indonesian military official, five people died in this massacre. The church (Bishop Belo) said that 25 people died. But, to me who escaped the massacre and witnessed it as well, I doubt the numbers they announced. I believe that more than 200 people died on that day.
4. None of the bodies of the victims have been returned to their families for proper burials.
5. All the brutal actions perpetrated by the militia and the Indonesian troops, whether it be terror, intimidation or massacre, are intended to threaten the people to choose integration with Indonesia or autonomy under Indonesian rule.

In this golden opportunity I would like to pass on some demands to the international community and to the government and the people of the US:

1. We call for the UN and especially the US government, to pressure the Inonesian government and the TNI to remove the weapons they supplied to the militia who committed terror, intimidation and killing of the unarmed civilians in Timor Leste.

2. We demand that the US government as the member of the UN Security Council to be more active in pressuring the Indonesian government and its military to create a safe and secure condition for carrying out the ballot in Timor Leste this coming August.

3. We demand that the US government pressure the Indonesian government and its military forces to respect the rights of the East Timorese to self determination.

Hereby our testimony to the people and government of the US. Again thank you very much for your kind attention.

My best regards,
Francisco de Jesus da Costa